

United Engineering Company Shipyard,
Control House for Dry Dock
(United Engineering Company Shipyard,
Seaway Transportation Building)
(Building No. 14)
2900 Main Street
Alameda
Alameda County
California

HAER No. CA-295-I

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PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

Historic American Engineering Record
National Park Service
Department of the Interior
San Francisco, California

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HISTORIC AMERICAN ENGINEERING RECORD

UNITED ENGINEERING COMPANY SHIPYARD, CONTROL HOUSE FOR DRY DOCK

(United Engineering Company Shipyard, Seaway Transportation Building)
(Building No. 14)

HAER No. CA-295-I

Location: 2900 Main Street
Alameda
Alameda County
California

U.S.G.S. 7.5 minute Oakland West, Calif. quadrangle.
Universal Transverse Mercator Coordinates: 10.562710.41842580

Present Owners:	074-0891-003	074-0905-001-04
	City of Alameda	Alameda Gateway Ltd.
	City Hall	2900 Main Street
	Alameda, CA 94501	Alameda, CA 94501

Present Occupant: Last occupant was Seaway Transportation

Present Use: Vacant

Significance: The control house is a contributing structure in the United Engineering Company Shipyard historic district that has been determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places. The United Engineering Company Shipyard, established in 1941 to build and repair ships for the U.S. Navy, is the last surviving of several large World War II shipyards in Alameda. United Engineering built 21 tugboats and repaired hundreds of ships during the war. The facility was one of the largest employers in Alameda and played an important economic and social role in the city. As the control house for a large dry dock that no longer exists, this building represents the ship repair part of the shipyard's business.

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PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

A. Physical History

1. **Date of erection:** the control house for the dry dock was built in 1943.
2. **Architects and engineers:** the control house and many of the other buildings constructed at the United Engineering Shipyards from 1941 to 1945 were designed by John Hudspeth.

John Hudspeth was an East Bay architect about whom little is known. He is not listed in an index to architectural licenses in California up to 1929. Information in the Oakland Cultural Heritage Survey identified three buildings by Hudspeth. In Oakland, he designed 1720 Franklin Street in 1941 and 2565 West Street in 1951. In Berkeley, he designed a building in Shattuck Square. In addition, he did work for the Mason-McDuffie Company and for the City of Oakland Department of Parks and Recreation.

3. **Original and subsequent owners, occupants, and uses:** The control house for the dry dock was built while United Engineering owned the shipyard. In 1946, Matson Navigation purchased the yards, including the control house. In 1948, Todd Shipyards leased the property and in 1959 they bought it. Finally, the current owner, Alameda Gateway, bought the property in 1983.

The control house for the dry dock was built to accommodate the electrical equipment (such as transformers, breakers, and switches) needed to operate the dry dock that sat in the wet basin attached to the west side of Pier 4. At the time of its construction, the first floor was used as a switchboard room, the shed housed a "pump for fire vents, mains and dry dock. S.W. line" and the second floor was an office.¹ When it was first shown on a map of the shipyard on 22 October 1942, it was labeled "dry dock store room and office". A memo dated 20 December 1942 described it as a dry dock control house. In another memo dated 8 February 1946, it was labeled building no. 22k, referring to its construction under contract to the Navy. On the 1948 Sanborn map it was labeled as an office. A 1951 map again called it a dry dock control house. In 1970, the Alameda County Recorder labeled it building no. 35. Sometime prior to 1984, during its ownership by Todd Shipyards, it was designated building no. 125.

¹ John Hudspeth, Architect, *Control House for Dry Dock* (Alameda, CA: United Engineering Co. Ltd., 4 January 1943) sheet 1.

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In the 1980s, the building was used as the office for Seaway Transportation. Currently, the building is vacant.

4. **Builder, contractor, suppliers:** unknown
5. **Original plans and construction:** in January of 1943, architect John Hudspeth created plans of the control house for the United Engineering Company. The control house was part of a construction campaign the company undertook in order to have adequate facilities to build tug boats for the U.S. Navy. The U.S. Navy—Bureau of Yards and Docks under Contract No. 76, approved the building for construction on 9 October 1943.²

The building was constructed as a two-story reinforced concrete structure with a rectangular plan and a reinforced-concrete flat roof. The chain link fence that encloses the transformers on the east side of the building and the second story balcony on the front (north) facade are original.

6. **Alterations and additions:** at some point, possibly in the 1980s, the large bundles of wire that ran from first floor through the second floor were cut just above the second-story floor line. Aside from these changes, the Control House has been little altered.

B. Historical Context

In 1941, United Engineering purchased an existing rail maintenance and repair yard and converted the facility to a shipyard. Shortly thereafter, the company secured contracts from the United States Navy to build tugboats for the war effort and later to repair larger ships. The property continued in use exclusively as a shipyard until 1984. Since that time, it has been used primarily as a shipyard and for other marine and industrial purposes.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement

1. **Architectural character:** the control house for the dry dock is utilitarian in appearance.

² Ibid.

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2. **Condition of fabric:** the control house has a high degree of original fabric, however, the doors have been replaced and the bulkhead wharf on which the building rests is badly deteriorated.

B. Description of Exterior

1. **Overall dimensions:** the control house is a small two-story building with a chain link enclosure on the east and an exterior staircase on the west. The building measures 12 feet 3 inches across the north and south ends and 20 feet across the east and west sides. The chain link enclosure abuts the east side of the building. It extends from the building 12 feet 3 inches and is 20 feet wide. The staircase (and shed underneath) project from the west facade of the building 4 feet 6 inches. Not including the attached shed, the building has a total area of 585 square feet.³
2. **Foundations:** the building sits on reinforced concrete beams, which in turn sit on the wooden beams of the bulkhead wharf.
3. **Walls:** the walls of the control house are made of board-formed reinforced concrete. There is a recessed seam at the second floor level. A shed underneath the stairs is covered with wood bevel siding and has a single vent. There are several signs painted on the walls of the building: on the south wall "Dry Dock 3 Sub 4," on the west wall "Seaway Transportation," and above a hose holder on the wood shed "For Fire and Emergency Use."
4. **Structural system, framing:** the walls are 6 inch thick concrete reinforced with a combination of vertical bars and an overall surface grid of bars. The vertical bars are 1/4 inch in diameter and are doubled between the floor and at the ceiling level. The surface grid is composed of 3/8 inch diameter bars laid every 12 inches. There is also a 1 inch diameter half-round rod wrapped around the building at the second floor level.⁴

The floor slab is reinforced with three or four 5/8 inch diameter rods alternating with two or three 7/8 inch rods. The rods run the width of the building every 6 inches. Rods of the same diameter run the length of the building but at less regular intervals. The second story floor and the roof are reinforced with 1/2 inch diameter longitudinal rods laid every 6 inches. These rods alternate with vertical ties made of #7 wire.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

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5. **Porches, stoops, balconies, bulkheads, verandahs, and stairs:** the only access to the second floor is by the exterior staircase and balcony. The stair is located on the west facade and is made of a wood frame and treads — there are no risers. The handrail is made of 3 by 6 inch boards.

An original balcony runs along the building on the north side. The balcony extends past both the east and west ends of the building and was likely used for access to the second floor and to provide workers with a wider view of the dry dock. The balcony is supported by reinforced concrete brackets that extend from the north side of the building. The deck and rails of the balcony are made of steel.

6. **Openings:**

- a. **Doorways and doors:** there is a doorway on each floor of the building and on the attached shed. On the north end of the first floor there are a pair of plank doors. There is a 3-inch hole in the top of each, probably for ventilation. A sign on each door warns visitors of the dangerous equipment inside: "Danger High Voltage Keep Out." On the north end of the second floor there is a single door. The door is unusually narrow, approximately 2 feet wide, and is a half-glass wooden door. The shed has a pair of wooden plank doors on the west facade.
- b. **Windows and shutters:** the first floor of the control house does not have any windows. The second floor has one window on the south facade and a pair of windows on the north facade. The south window is a wood framed awning window with wire glass. The north windows are larger and are fitted with plate glass. The first window is a narrow casement, and the second is a larger, fixed, picture window.

7. **Roof:**

- a. **Shape, covering:** the roof of the building is flat, and the covering is not visible. The roof of the attached shed is covered with a "mineral surfaced cap sheet."⁵
- b. **Cornice, eaves:** the building has overhanging eaves. The eaves are made of reinforced concrete and are beveled at the edges.
- c. **Dormers, cupolas, towers, vents:** none are visible.

⁵ Ibid.

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C. Description of Interior

1. **Floor plans:**
 - a. **First floor:** is composed of a single room that houses breakers in a metal cage and a workbench and cabinets.
 - b. **Second floors:** the second floor is a single room that historically overlooked the dry dock through the windows on the north.
2. **Flooring:** the floors of the first floor are reinforced concrete covered with cement. Six removable steel deck plates cover holes in the concrete that provide access to cables below the building. The second floor also has reinforced concrete floors but is covered with carpet.
3. **Wall and ceiling finish:** the interior walls and ceilings of both floors are exposed board-formed reinforced concrete.
4. **Windows:** the windows have wooden frames on the interior.
5. **Hardware:** most hardware appears to be original and is of standard manufactured design.
6. **Mechanical equipment:**
 - a. **Heating, air conditioning, ventilation:** there are no heating or air conditioning systems, and ventilation is passive.
 - b. **Lighting:** the building was wired for electricity at the time of its construction, and was built to house switches, transformers, and breakers. The first and second floors have what appear to be the original incandescent lighting fixtures.
 - c. **Plumbing:** the control house does not have plumbing.
 - d. **Transformers and Breakers:** as the control house for the dry dock, the building housed a large amount of electrical equipment. There are three large transformers in the original chain link cage on the east side of the building. In the interior of the building there is more equipment inside another metal cage. Along the exterior of the cage there are a series of circuit breakers. One breaker is labeled "Westinghouse Circuit Breaker" and "Main Electrical Shut Off Switch." Nine other breakers are labeled

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with areas of the Dry Dock, for example, "Dry Dock Section 6." In black marker "Disconnected. Do Not Use" has been written on all breakers. Two "Sangamo" kilowatt meters are located on the south side of the cage. Large bundles of wires (approximately 3 inches in diameter) originally extended from the first floor to the second floor. The wires have been cut off at the second floor level.

- e. **Loudspeaker:** what appears to be a loudspeaker is mounted on the northeast corner of the building.
- 7. **Original furnishings:** original wooden cabinetry and workbenches are located along the south wall and part of the east wall of the first floor.

D. Site

- 1. **General setting and orientation:** the control house is located at the south end of Pier 4 on the remains of the bulkhead wharf. The building faces north and overlooks the west side of Pier 4 where a dry dock was located in the 1940s.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Original Architectural Drawings, Maps and Plans

Alameda Gateway. *Existing Site Plan*. 30 January 1984.

Hudspeth, John, Architect. *Control House for Dry Dock*. Alameda, CA: United Engineering Co. Ltd., 4 January 1943.

Kennedy, Clyde C., Engineering Office of. "Area Plan and Interceptor Profile: Improvements to Sewer System for Properties Occupied by Todd Shipyards Corp., Alameda, Calif." Prepared for Matson - United Properties, Inc. 9 August 1951.

Sanborn Map Company. *Insurance Maps of Alameda, California*, p. 93. New York: 1948.

United Engineering Company Ltd. *Alameda Shipyard: Map Showing Existing Facilities and Those Under Construction*. 22 October 1942.

United Engineering Company Ltd. *Map of Alameda Shipyard Showing Existing and Proposed Additional Facilities*. Plan no. UEC-A-1-7. 14 June 1943.

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B. Bibliography

Alameda County Recorder. Exhibit B: Description of Buildings, Waterfront Improvements, Shipyard Utilities, Machinery and Equipment. 18 February 1970.
RE: 2568, IM 80-82.

Thompson, Richard G., Lieutenant Colonel, San Francisco District, Corps of Engineers. Letter to Cherilyn Widell, State Historic Preservation Officer, requesting Determination of Eligibility. 30 April 1998.

United Engineering Company Ltd. Memo to Bureau of Ships, Washington DC.
"Contract NObs-76 – Funds for completion of plant facilities". 20 December 1942.

United Engineering Company Ltd. Memo to Chief of the Bureau of Yards and Docks. "Reproduction Costs and Market Value to Third Parties of 'Civil Works'", with Estimated Schedule of "Civil Works" Facilities. 8 February 1946.

United States. Army Corps of Engineers – San Francisco District and California. State Historic Preservation Officer. Memorandum of Agreement Regarding the Oakland Harbor Navigation Improvements Project, Alameda County, California. Signed 31 January 2001 and 22 January 2001.

Widell, Cherilyn, State Historic Preservation Officer. Letter to Richard G. Thompson, Lieutenant Colonel, San Francisco District, Corps of Engineers, Regarding Oakland Harbor Ship Channel Deepening and Improvements, Alameda County [Determination of Eligibility Concurrence]. 9 June 1998.

PART IV. PROJECT INFORMATION

This report was prepared for the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Port of Oakland in accordance with a Memorandum of Agreement (MOA) between the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, San Francisco District and the California State Historic Preservation Officer concerning the former United Engineering Company shipyard. The Port of Oakland and the City of Alameda were concurring parties to the MOA. The MOA was created because of a proposal by the U.S. Army Corp of Engineers in partnership with the Port of Oakland to sponsor the Oakland Harbor Navigation Improvements Project. This project "would deepen Oakland Harbor channels and berth areas from -42 feet mean lower low water (MLLW) to -50 feet MLLW, with 2 feet overdredge allowance" and widen some portions of the channels. These actions, which would constitute an Undertaking under Section 106, would result in the demolition of several buildings and structures at the former United Engineering Company Shipyard. Because the shipyard had been determined eligible for the National Register of Historic Places, the

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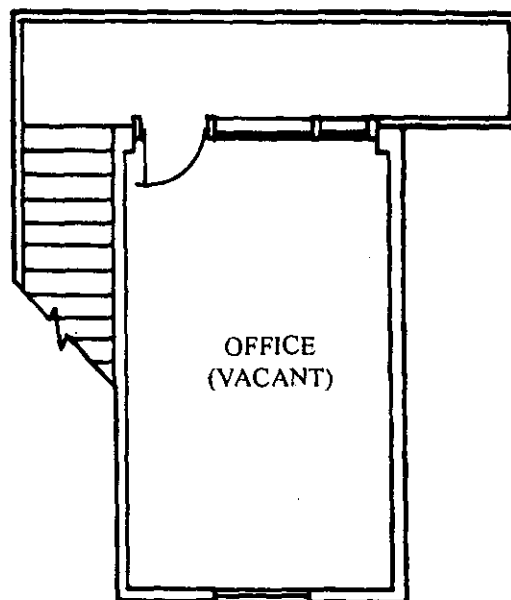
Undertaking would have an adverse effect on the property. Under the MOA, the following HAER documentation has been prepared: a written historic and descriptive report on the shipyard as a whole, seventeen separate reports on individual buildings and structures in the shipyard, including this report, and photographic documentation.

This building will be demolished as part of the federal undertaking.

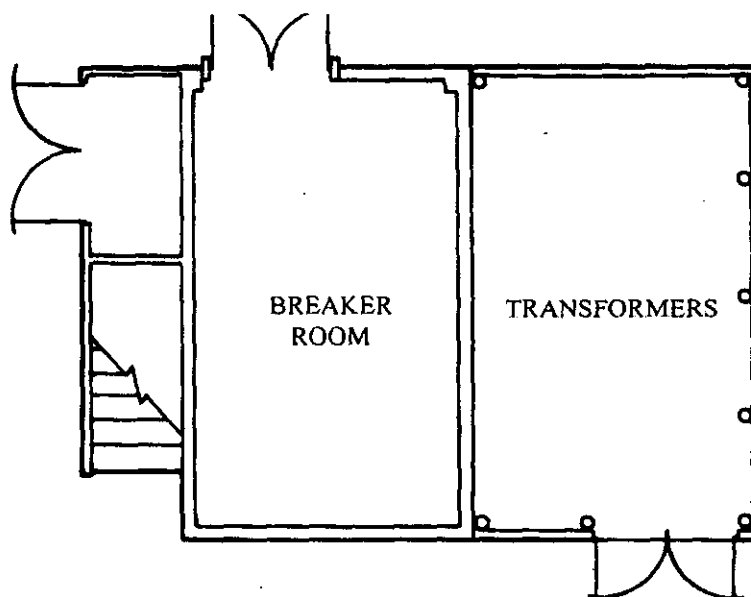
This report was prepared by Jody Stock, architectural designer, and Michael R. Corbett, architectural historian. Corbett was a subcontractor to Basin Research Associates of San Leandro. Basin Research was under contract to g. borchard & associates.

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Second
Floor



First
Floor



0 2 4 8 12 feet

BUILDING NO. 14: CONTROL HOUSE FOR DRY DOCK

Prepared by Jody R. Stock
12/14/00

*Plan is based on drawing, John Hudspeth, Architect, *Control House for Dry Dock* (Alameda, CA: United Engineering Co. Ltd., 4 January 1943). The plan reflects current field conditions and is to scale.